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ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ITS SECOND SESSION

Draft report

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Chapter ___

ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM IN THE FIELD OF WATER AND MINERAL RESOURCES, AND INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

1. The Committee considered agenda item 3 at its 1st to 4th meetings, on 22 and 23 February 1994. It had before it four reports.

2. The Director of the United Nations Revolving Fund for Natural Resources Exploration introduced the report of the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on activities of the United Nations Revolving Fund for Natural Resources Exploration (E/C.7/1994/12). He cited the role and activities of the Fund in assisting Governments to broaden their knowledge of their mineral endowment and to attract private sector capital to develop discovered mineral deposits. He noted the increasing difficulties in financing activities through the Fund and the importance of maintaining contributions from individual countries, and he urged the Committee's continuing support.

3. The representative of the Department for Development Support and Management Services presented the report of the Secretary-General on technical cooperation activities of the United Nations system in the mining sector (E/C.7/1994/3). She provided an overview of the United Nations organizations undertaking technical cooperation activities in the mining sector and described the methodology and evaluation of United Nations system activities, highlighting initiatives in support of capacity-building, investment promotion and environmental management. She concluded by briefly describing the application

of geophysical technology to humanitarian assistance efforts in the area of land-mine clearance in war-ravaged countries.

4. The representative of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development introduced the report of the Secretary-General on activities of the organizations of the United Nations system and inter-agency coordination in the field of water resources (E/C.7/1994/2). He described the progress achieved within the United Nations system in adopting a comprehensive approach towards implementing the recommendations of Agenda 21 on freshwater resources. He cited the need for a more holistic and integrated approach to land and water resources development and management, and emphasized the importance of strengthening coordination at the country level and improving the flow and management of information.

5. The representative of the Department for Development Support and Management Services presented the report of the Secretary-General on existing international principles, rules and regulations governing the relationship between the owner of data collected through remote-sensing techniques and the country to which such data are related, and the present state of activities within the United Nations system (E/C.7/1994/11). He summarized selected remote-sensing concepts, indicating that future activities would be increasingly multidisciplinary, in order to monitor environmental conditions on a global scale. He described some of the principles relating to remote-sensing, and activities undertaken by the United Nations system in remote-sensing, and cited the Office for Outer Space Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat as the main focal point in promoting international cooperation in space.

6. A number of experts emphasized the need for more integrated approaches in the management of natural resources, calling for a holistic approach that would also encompass ecological, social and economic considerations. Governments were encouraged to integrate such approaches into national development plans.

7. With regard to water resources, several experts, while noting progress achieved, stressed the need to strengthen coordination and harmonization mechanisms at all levels, as well as within sectors, so that the goals of Agenda 21 could be achieved in practical terms. Particular attention should be directed towards achieving action at the global political level, with emphasis also on programme formulation. It was also proposed that funding organizations and non-governmental organizations be involved in that process.

8. Several experts noted the important role of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) Subcommittee on Water Resources as a mechanism for addressing duplication; one expert suggested it direct greater attention to aspects of integration and definition of strategic directions.

9. The need to broaden the dialogue on improving coordination was also stressed, with a view to involving non-governmental and professional organizations, bilateral entities and other external support agencies in that process. This might be achieved through extended sessions of the ACC Subcommittee or by other means.

10. One expert proposed that Governments re-examine their own internal structures with a view to facilitating coordination.

11. To enhance coordination and minimize duplication of efforts, and to raise awareness further, particularly among policy makers, concerning the magnitude of the water crisis which has reached global proportions, several experts emphasized the critical importance of information dissemination and management in devising a global water strategy. The need to compile and integrate data on the availability of freshwater in relation to demand, in order to demonstrate the seriousness of the water crisis, was stressed. One expert cited the importance of compiling systematic knowledge bases for the regional distribution of water, especially groundwater. Another observed the need to develop criteria for data collection. It was further suggested by one expert that duplication might be avoided by focusing on individual countries and their specific problems.

12. One expert suggested that integrated water resources management should also encompass aspects relating to land use and its impact on water management.

13. The impact of water scarcity on women was noted, as was the need to re-examine development strategies to strengthen women's participation at levels above the local level.

14. One member emphasized the inadequacy of financial inputs to the United Nations technical assistance programmes for mineral resources development; in that regard, the useful role of the United Nations Revolving Fund for Natural Resources Exploration, and the need to strengthen its financial base, was cited. It was also noted that changes in consumption patterns were detrimental to the mineral industry and have resulted in the depression of metals prices. One member recommended that issues having an effect on consumption patterns be considered.

15. Another member emphasized the importance of the development and implementation of adequate social policies in order to respond to the ongoing trend towards privatization of the mining sector. He recommended that the Secretariat prepare a study on the social implications of the privatization of the mining industry. He also emphasized the important role of geological data standardization and the activities aimed at the creation and establishment of national databank information centres.

16. It was observed that the global assessment of mineral potential was currently based on identified resources only. It was indicated that the United Nations could take the lead in developing a long-term view of global mineral resource potential, that the United Nations needed to integrate it with other issues such as population growth and soil degradation, and that it should be a part of the United Nations mandate in accordance with the spirit of Agenda 21.

17. One member noted the sharp decline of available UNDP funding to sustain activities of the Department for Development Support and Management Services in the field of mineral resources, as it addressed the areas of poverty alleviation and the environment.

18. Several experts noted that because of the general trend towards privatization of state mining companies and the more open attitudes of countries towards foreign investment, the role of the Fund needed to be reappraised in the context of those broad developments.

19. In citing the usefulness of the report on remote-sensing (E/C.7/1994/11) in providing an overview of activities, several members proposed that the future report on remote-sensing should emphasize more technical aspects, and the Committee therefore requested an update on remote-sensing techniques and related matters, which was within the working framework of the Committee. There was a consensus to include remote-sensing issues as they relate to water and minerals in each report to be prepared for the third session of the Committee.

20. Statements were also made by the representatives of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, the United Nations University, the World Meteorological Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme/United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. In many cases, background reports were circulated to the Committee members.

21. In emphasizing the need for strengthened cooperation between the regional commissions and the specialized agencies, several experts commented on the usefulness of information provided by United Nations agencies and organizations. There was general consensus on the need for background papers on the work of the regional commissions and the specialized agencies for consideration at the third session of the Committee.